

# the guardian weekly

September 2012

**Level » Advanced**

**Style » Individual or group activities**



Welcome to the Guardian Weekly's special news-based materials to support learners and teachers of English. Each month, the Guardian Weekly newspaper selects topical news articles that can be used to practise English language skills. The materials are graded for two levels: Advanced and Lower Intermediate. These worksheets can be downloaded free from [guardian.co.uk/weekly/](http://guardian.co.uk/weekly/). You can also find more advice for teachers and learners from the Guardian Weekly's Learning English section on the site.

**Materials prepared by Janet Hardy-Gould**

## Avon cosmetics sellers prosper in South Africa



Home service ... an image from a 1960s Avon publicity campaign PA

### Before reading

**1 Look at the headline, photo and caption. Discuss the questions below with a partner.**

- a** How does the Avon company sell its products?
- b** Is the company popular in your country? Why do you think it is successful?
- c** What do you know about the history of South Africa?
- d** Why do you think selling Avon products might be important to some women there?

**2 Vocabulary from the article - abstract nouns.**  
Complete the definitions with the words below.  
**achievement, autonomy, evangelism, empowerment, self-confidence**

- a** If you have , you believe in yourself and your abilities.
- b** If you have a job with , you make your own decisions.
- c** If you have a sense of , you are keen to spread the message about your ideas.
- d** If you have a feeling of , you feel strong and in control of your life.

# the guardian weekly

September 2012

e If you have a sense of , you feel proud about something that you have done.

What do you think the article might say about the overall experience of being an Avon representative?

## Article

### Avon cosmetics sellers prosper in South Africa

- 1 The sound of “Avon calling” was first heard in rural New York and went on to echo down suburban streets around the world; less well known is the popularity of the door-to-door makeup-selling company in South Africa, and its social impact on impoverished women.
- 2 Yet this is the unlikely subject of a three-year academic study by Oxford University researchers, funded by a \$250,000 grant from the UK government, which found that becoming an Avon lady in South Africa is often a route to financial independence and greater self-confidence.
- 3 Professor Linda Scott, a leader of the project, said: “I was not prepared for the way the women felt about it. We came to call it ‘lipstick evangelism’. There was a significant number who had sad stories - they had been raped; they had HIV - and they took up Avon as a last resort.”
- 4 Since its founding, in 1886 by a struggling door-to-door bookseller who switched to perfumes, Avon has expanded to more than 100 countries.
- 5 Scott said it arrived in South Africa in the mid-1990s, and now has tens of thousands of representatives - black and white women and a few men.
- 6 Trade union estimates say black women in South Africa earn an average of \$150 a month, while white women earn \$1,200 and white men around \$2,300. The Oxford research included surveys with 300 black Avon representatives and 77 customers, plus interviews with Avon’s management and consumers.
- 7 It found Avon representatives’ income put them in the top half of black women in their communities, and brought them in line with what a black South African man earns.
- 8 Three out of four representatives told the survey Avon had helped them achieve financial autonomy, and nearly 90% said they had learned skills from Avon that could be transferred to other employment.
- 9 “Respondents reported in very large numbers that working for Avon had given them confidence and social skills, as well as earning them respect from family and their community,” the researchers said.
- 10 “This effect on their sense of empowerment seems to result from the supportive and gender-friendly network, as well as the formal recognition system that Avon employs to reward and inspire achievement.”

**David Smith** Johannesburg

## Glossary

**rural** (adjective) in the countryside, as opposed to the city

**impoverished** (adjective) very poor

**grant** (noun) money given, especially by the government, for a particular purpose

**struggling** (adjective) when a person finds it hard to earn money

**to bring someone in line with somebody** (phrase) to bring somebody to the same level of earnings as another person

# the guardianweekly

September 2012

## While reading

### 1 Read the first five paragraphs of the article.

Complete the summary with words from the text.

The Avon company was first started in the year

(a) \_\_\_\_\_ by a man who

was originally a (b) \_\_\_\_\_.

Since then it has spread to over

(c) \_\_\_\_\_ different nations

around the world. It first moved to South Africa in the

(d) \_\_\_\_\_ and there are

now large numbers of both

(e) \_\_\_\_\_ and

(f) \_\_\_\_\_ representatives in

the country. The new study by

(g) \_\_\_\_\_ at Oxford

University examined the

(h) \_\_\_\_\_ that becoming

an Avon lady had on South African women's lives.

### 2 Read the rest of the article. Decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F). Underline where you find the information in the text.

a ☐ There is a huge difference between black and white women's average earnings.

b ☐ The new research only focused on the Avon representatives.

c ☐ Black women Avon representatives usually earn more than black men.

d ☐ Around half of the women said they had learned transferable skills.

e ☐ The survey respondents reported a range of positive effects from their employment.

f ☐ The company has a formal system which inspires and recognises achievement.

b Professor Linda Scott, a leader of **the project** ...

(paragraph 3)

c "I was not prepared for the way the women felt about **it**." (paragraph 3)

d "... and **they** took up Avon as a last resort."

(paragraph 3)

e Scott said **it** arrived in South Africa in the mid-1990s ... (paragraph 5)

f It found Avon representatives' income put them in the top half ... (paragraph 7)

Why do you think referencing is important in a text?

### 2 Preposition collocations with nouns and verbs

Certain nouns and verbs are typically followed by specific prepositions. Look at this example from the text

... its social impact **on** impoverished women.

(paragraph 1)

Complete the sentences with the prepositions below.

about, for, of, on, to, with

a The researchers weren't prepared \_\_\_\_\_

the results \_\_\_\_\_ the study and how the

women felt \_\_\_\_\_ their jobs.

## After reading

### 1 What do the words in bold refer back to in the article?

a Yet **this** is the unlikely subject of a three-year academic study ... (paragraph 2)

# the guardian weekly

September 2012

**b** The women can often transfer skills

other parts of their lives and the job can be a route  greater independence.

**c** The representatives who worked  Avon developed a real sense  empowerment.

**d** The interviews  the women indicated that the job had had a very positive effect  their lives.

## Activity - discussion

**Work in small groups. Discuss the questions below and make notes.**

**a** Are there any door-to-door selling companies in your country? What do they sell? What sales techniques do they use?

**b** From an employee's point of view what are the advantages and disadvantages of such a job? For example, advantages: autonomy, achievement; disadvantages: frustration, long hours.

**c** What are the required personal attributes of a door-to-door salesperson? Which person in your group might be suited to the task? Why?

**Share your ideas with the rest of the class.**



**Do you have door-step skills? A salesman gains the trust of a householder** Alamy

## Answers

Before reading

**2a** self-confidence **b** autonomy **c** evangelism **d** empowerment **e** achievement

While reading

**1a** 1886 **b** bookseller **c** 100 **d** mid-1990s **e** black **f** white **g** researchers **h** impact

**2a** T **b** F **c** F **d** F **e** T **f** T

After reading

**1a** The popularity of Avon in South Africa and its effect on impoverished women.

**b** The Oxford academic study.

**c** Becoming / being an Avon lady.

**d** The significant number with sad stories.

**e** Avon

**f** The Oxford research, Avon representatives

It avoids repetition and provides textual cohesion.

**2a** for, of, about **b** to, to **c** for, of **d** with, on